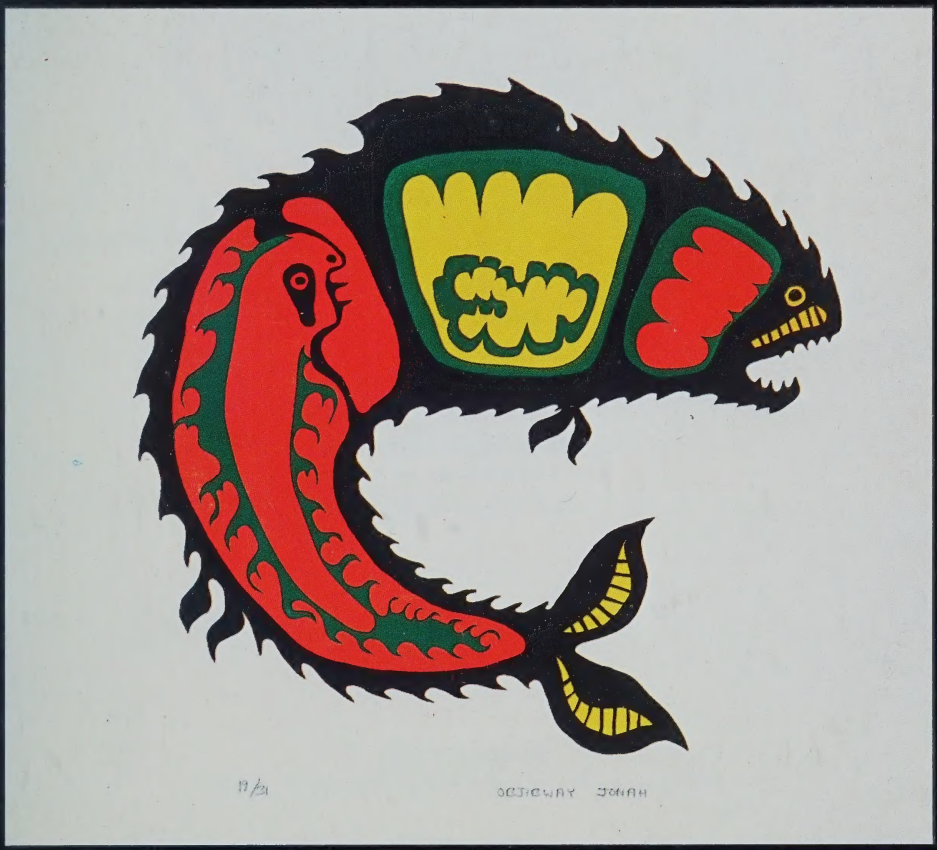
# contemporary native art of canada — silk screens from the triple k co-operative, red lake, ontario



ROM

**Royal Ontario Museum**
**Ethnology Department**
**100 Queen's Park**
**Toronto, Ontario**

**May 15 — June 30, 1977**

Supporting Agency:
The Department of Indian
and Northern Affairs

**Front cover:**
**Ojibway Jonah,** Barry Peters, 1976, 22½" x 15"

**Back cover:**
**Loon's Nocturnal Call,** Goyce Kakegamic, 1977, 30" x 22"

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Photography by Bill Robertson, Photography Department, ROM
Printed in Canada by Tollefson Lithographing Ltd.

**Opera in the Wilds,** Saul Williams, 1976, 30" x 22"

# introduction

Triple K Co-operative represents a radical innovation in Native art in Ontario for several reasons. Foremost among them is the belief by the Co-operative that Native artistic expression is most effective when a unity of good design, meaningful content, and high technical quality is achieved. It is also believed that these conditions are best ensured when Native artists control all phases of their art production, either directly or indirectly, from design conception through to the marketing of the final product. Triple K has also struggled to maintain its roots in northwestern Ontario close to the origins of the art and the homes of its artists, and at the same time to maintain a successful economic enterprise.

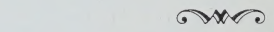
Ironically, it is the inextricable unity of form and content that constitutes a viewing challenge for the contemporary art audience. The sheer immediacy of the message and the alien and often disturbing visual world depicted in the art

frequently overwhelm the viewer. As a result, the art and the artists are too often dismissed as curiosities, and insufficient critical attention is given to the formal quality of the work. Other factors too contribute to the lack of serious consideration of Indian art by mainstream art audiences and critics.

The common misconception of the Indian artist as an inspired primitive is reinforced by self-styled philanthropists or patron/collectors who in another age would have trekked through the jungles of New Guinea in search of a modern-day noble savage, but now purport to have found one in their own backyard. These citizens, while feeding private collections at bargain prices, are over-anxious to locate Native art in a continuum of ancient traditions, to outline each legend, to establish each artist as an intuitive prodigy or as a cultural saviour. With all the best intentions, they impede the development of a mainstream market and undermine the standardization of pricing for Indian art.

At the other end of the spectrum are the more pragmatic opportunists who utilize the myth-making of the philanthropist to flog poor-quality, cheaply made reproductions of original Indian designs. Designs are frequently pirated or reproduced without the artist's knowledge. They are a form of airport art and are in fact commonly found in airport gift shops or in souvenir stores of the plastic-totem-pole variety. This treatment, of course, severely discredits the artist whose work is reproduced.

It is necessary to describe these unfortunate phenomena in order to illustrate the important role that Triple K has assumed in the perspective of Ontario Native art. Given these conditions, the two most significant steps taken by Triple K were the hiring of an agent and the acquisition of a lawyer. But the damage done by both philanthropists and opportunists alike is compounded by the resultant lack of serious attention paid by the mainstream art community to Native art. Native artists like all artists need informed and constructive critics no less than does the public. This point cannot be overemphasized. For Native art is neither propaganda nor folk art but a new art expression that can and should rate among Canada's important and distinctive cultural achievements. Without serious critical consideration and appraisal both by Native artists themselves and by mainstream art commentators, Native art will remain in an infant stage and very probably die an early death.



Triple K with its base of operations in Red Lake belies the romantic notion of an arts colony in the bush. Both office and workshop are housed in a 25' x 25' storefront on the main street of the town diagonally across from the bus terminal. As a result passers-by are more likely to be disoriented transients rather than art connoisseurs.

Red Lake itself is the centre of a gold-mining district with a population of approximately 6,000. It is 100 air miles north of Kenora and 180 air miles east of Winnipeg. At a show organized by Triple K in the summer of 1976 in nearby Balmertown, local attendance was both healthy and enthusiastic, and a full third of the show, which had been previously displayed at the Kingston Olympics, was sold to local residents. The district is justifiably proud of the Co-operative.

For a fine arts co-operative to survive at all is unusual. For a Native-run arts enterprise to operate successfully out of an isolated northwestern Ontario town sounds at the best improbable. But Triple K is a reality, and the silk-screen prints are more than simply the products of fine artists. They are also a tribute to the hard work of the Co-operative against great odds.

Elizabeth McLuhan

**Loon's Flight,** Josh Kakegamic, 1976, 30" x 22½"

## triple k co-operative

Triple K was set up in 1973 by Josh and Henry Kakegamic. The idea of a print shop was one that Joshim had been considering for over a year before the actual establishment of the workshop in Red Lake. For Josh, artistic control over the printing of his work was a major concern. Also, the costs involved in contract printing were a serious handicap. Together with Henry, therefore, he worked out the details and laid the organization, and the print shop came into being in the fall of 1973.

In the first year of operation, the shop produced a number of unlimited reproductions on cloth and paper. The artists who contributed most of the works were Joshim and Goyce Kakegamic. During the first year the interest created by the prints led to some very valuable contacts in art circles. Because of its remoteness from the major art centres, it was a formidable task for Triple K to acquire the kind of information and knowledge necessary for attaining serious recognition by art critics. Such subjects as dis-

tribution, commissions, art gallery/artist responsibilities, and copyright were all unfamiliar matters to the artists at Red Lake.

Gradually, through its own efforts and with the support of a few committed individuals, Triple K began to rethink and reassess its approach to printing and its role vis-à-vis its artists. In particular, it gave some thought to the type of prints being produced at the time. With the growing reputations of the artists already involved and with the printing of some works by Norval Morrisseau, it became essential to maintain a certain artistic standard. Thus it was decided that Triple K would begin printing original limited-edition prints only.

There has been much controversy over the meaning of "original prints", particularly in regard to Indian prints. We should therefore like to clarify what we mean, and what we at present print. The prints at Triple K are made from drawings designed specifically for the silk-screen process by the artist, who indicates all the colours in the design. One proof is then printed. This "Bon A Tirer" is submitted to the artist. If he approves it, he signs and dates the proof. If he does not, the initial process is repeated with changes desired by the artist until the "Bon A Tirer" is perfect. When the proof is approved, the edition is printed, and signed and numbered by the artist.

The artist is thus involved at every stage of the process and makes all artistic decisions. The technical details are worked out between the artist and the printers. The Co-Op tries to ensure the presence of the artist during the critical stages of the process, though this is not always possible if he lives at a distance from Red Lake. Given the Co-Op's commitment to this standard, we feel that our prints are artistically, technically, and aesthetically distinct from limited editions reproduced from paintings.

During 1975 a number of events caused us to address ourselves to the subject of copyright. It was becoming increasingly obvious that for lack of contractual safeguards, many works of Indian artists were being reproduced without the artists' consent and/or without specific royalty arrangements. As most of Triple K's artists had experienced such difficulties personally, Triple K decided to retain the services of a copyright lawyer.

To date, we have been involved in a number of copyright disputes, most of which have been resolved to the benefit of the artist. However, the continuing existence of rather questionable contracts and the general lack of knowledge by the artists have clearly illustrated the need for the dissemination of information on copyright and other related subjects. With the help and advice of our lawyer and distributor, we are gradually becoming able to meet this need. At the very least we are able to contact those who can answer the questions.

With regard to Triple K artists, a standard contract, drawn by our lawyer, is signed by both the artists and the President of the Co-Op before any prints are published. This contract deals with a wide variety of matters pertaining to copyright, reproduction, artistic control, distribution, and royalties.

Distribution of the prints has always been of major importance to Triple K. Through a trial-and-error process during the first eighteen months, we soon learned that an organized approach to the market was essential to the successful operation of a workshop so far removed from the art centres. We were most fortunate in finding a solution to our problem in the distribution provided by Roy Maxwell. His twenty years' experience and his extensive knowledge of the Canadian art market have been of inestimable value to the artists. The Co-Op's prints have been distributed across

**Wolverine,** Paddy Peters, 1976, 21" x 14½"

Canada to approximately fifty galleries. Such distribution has considerably enhanced the reputations of the established artists and has given the newer and younger ones an opportunity not afforded them in their isolated communities. Recognition of and interest in the prints have inevitably led to enquiries about other works of the artists, and often to direct contacts and to shows.

In looking toward the future, we hope to expand to include more artists, both new and established. To date, we have published the work of seven artists. With an expansion of our facilities which we expect to conclude in the summer of 1977, we shall be in a position to accommodate more artists and possibly other printing media. Although remote from urban art centres, we have been able to provide a focal point for artistic pursuit in the northwestern region of the province. Certainly the response to our Red Lake exhibit held in the summer of 1976 confirmed the existence of a keen local interest in Native art.

Triple K has provided a great opportunity for the artists and for the public. For the artists there is the opportunity to become known to a much wider audience; and for the public the chance to view the works of an exciting group of Canadian artists.

Triple K Co-operative

# biographies

**Goyce Kakegamic**

Born at Sandy Lake Reserve, Ontario, in 1948: Cree.

Goyce began painting in the late sixties and like most of the artists in northwestern Ontario is self-taught. His first works were included in the numerous group shows of Indian artists held in northwestern Ontario in 1970-72. Influences of other artists, in particular Morrisseau and Ray, are evident in his work but in no way detract from the development of his individualism.

The first Toronto exhibit of a wide range of Goyce's work was held at Aggregation Gallery in a two-man show with his brother Josh in 1974. Since then his work has been exhibited regularly in a variety of shows and tours and is included in the Canadian McMichael Collection at Kleinburg and the Mohawk Institute in Brantford. He was also represented in the England/Germany Tour of Woodland and Indian art in 1970.

Goyce was one of the first participants in Triple K Co-op after its inception and has produced a number of editions over the past three years. He continues today to publish through the Co-Op, and also works as a Guidance Counsellor for the Red Lake Board of Education.

**Joshim Kakegamic**

Born at Sandy Lake Reserve, Ontario, in 1952: Cree.

Joshim began painting in the late sixties under the initial influence of two artists, Norval Morrisseau and Carl Ray, who were at that time holding a series of workshops on the reserves in the area. A few months later in a similar type of programme, Joshim was asked to join with Morrisseau and Ray to hold demonstration classes at reserve schools across northeastern and southern Ontario. During this period and at a later month-long solo workshop at Fanshawe College in London, Joshim began painting in earnest. He first participated in a group show at North Bay in 1969, which was followed by a series of shows around northwestern Ontario.

It was during his stay in London, Ontario, that Joshim first took an interest in other forms of art, such as print-making. While a few of his prints were produced through Indian Crafts of Ontario in 1971, Joshim realized that such an endeavour would be far more beneficial to him if he maintained artistic control over the process. Thus he began looking into the possibility of establishing a silk-screen print shop. In collaboration with Henry Kakegamic, his oldest brother, he succeeded in establishing a print shop in Red Lake in the fall of 1973.

During this time Joshim was in touch with several Toronto galleries, and as a result is now represented by Aggregation Gallery. His first show with Aggregation was held jointly with his brother, Goyce Kakegamic, in the fall of 1975. Since then, Joshim's strong and vibrant works of art, both paintings and original prints, have been viewed across Canada in numerous exhibits, as well as in private and public collections. During 1976 alone his work was exhibited by some ten different galleries. Along with his painting Joshim continues to play a major role in the operation of the Co-Op.

**Norval Morrisseau**

Born at Beardmore, Ontario, in 1932: Ojibway.

Norval, now a renowned artist both nationally and internationally, began his artistic career some twenty years ago. His

**Otter and Other Life Forms,** Norval Morrisseau, 1976, 30" x 22½"

work, which has passed through many changes in form and execution during this period, continues to inspire artists across the country. His reputation as the father of contemporary Indian art was not easily achieved. Norval broke with the established norms and traditions of his elders to begin to communicate the history and legends of the Indian people through art.

Norval's work has been exhibited extensively across Canada and is included in many important public collections, including that of the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, and the Canadian McMichael Collection in Kleinburg. In 1976 his work was the subject of a feature story in *Time* magazine. He has also been the subject of several films documenting Canadian Indian art. On the international level, Norval has received considerable recognition, and his work has been exhibited in several European and American cities.

Norval is at present living in Winnipeg but he continues to be represented by Pollock Gallery in Toronto. His first prints were published some years ago. However, it is in the past three years that his work has been published on a more regular basis. Norval's involvement with Triple K dates back to the Co-Op's early days. His work has also been published through other printing organizations.

Norval's creativity and versatility continue to intrigue his admirers and critics alike. He is considered by many to be one of the great contemporary Canadian artists.

**Barry Peters**

Born at Pikangikum Reserve, Ontario, in 1938: Ojibway.

Barry is essentially self-taught, and during 1976-77 has dedicated his efforts fully to artistic pursuits, producing a number of original prints as well as paintings. His first solo exhibition was held in Tillsonburg, Ontario, in the spring of 1976.

Since he began working at the Triple K print workshop in Red Lake, Barry has published over ten editions. These prints were first viewed at a group exhibit of graphics at the University of Manitoba Faculty Club, organized by the Co-Op in the fall of 1976. Barry also participated in a group show of Triple K artists at the Shayne Gallery, Montreal, in late 1976.

With his present enthusiasm, Barry appears to have the dedication and talent to become a recognized and noteworthy artist.

**Paddy Peters**

Born at Pikangikum Reserve, Ontario, in 1956: Ojibway.

Paddy began his painting in his late teens, and his first sales were to visitors to the reserve. Over the past few years his art has become an important part of his activities. He is self-taught and follows the tradition of other artists in the area in both form and subject.

Paddy is the most recent member of the Triple K Co-Op. He first spent time at the Co-Op in March of 1977 when he began to learn the silk-screen printing process. The new editions of Paddy's work are the first of his prints to be published.

Paddy's recent prints and his paintings will add to his reputation as an artist, particularly when his work is given the wider audience that it deserves.

**Saul Williams**

Born at North Caribou Lake, Ontario, in 1954: Ojibway.

Saul began painting in his teens and received his formal training at Elliot Lake in 1971. This was followed by his participation in the Schreiber Island Project in 1972. During the early seventies, in an attempt to illustrate his art to the public, Saul worked as a demonstrator at both the Mariposa Folk Festival and the Canadian National Exhibition. His paintings have been on exhibit at numerous locations during recent years, including York and Guelph universities and Oakville Centennial Gallery. They were also included in an exhibition of Woodland Indian art that toured England and Germany.

In 1976 Saul began working at Triple K Co-Op in Red Lake, where he participated in a month-long workshop on silk-screen printing. He then worked on the publication of several editions of his prints. He continues today to produce paintings and prints regularly.

Saul's most recent exhibits were in Toronto and Montreal during the late fall and winter of 1976-77. Although he is not yet represented by a gallery, his work is in great demand and never lacks an enthusiastic audience.

Saul, who works full time at his art, has already made a significant contribution to the growing body of Native art in Canada. His paintings and prints represent an individualistic and often humorous interpretation of the many legends of his ancestors.

# Triple K Co-operative Inc.

## The ROM Show

| Artist | Title | Size of Edition | Year |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Norval Morrisseau** | Loon and Fish | 56 | 1976 |
| | Nature of Things | 54 | 1976 |
| | Jaws | 54 | 1976 |
| | Otter and Other Life Forms | 41 | 1976 |
| | Merman and Cycle of Fish | 51 | 1976 |
| | Loon Totemic and Grebes with Human | 60 | 1976 |
| | Group of Owls | 45 | 1976 |
| **Josh Kakegamic** | Bear | 65 | 1975 |
| | Interpreter | 65 | 1975 |
| | Smoking the Meat | 48 | 1975 |
| | Family | 57 | 1975 |
| | Rooted Windigo | 50 | 1976 |
| | Loon's Flight | 70 | 1976 |
| | Skunk | 75 | 1977 |
| | Rabbits | 65 | 1977 |
| | Two Lovers | 84 | 1977 |
| | Early Bird | 65 | 1977 |
| **Saul Williams** | Opera in the Wilds | 70 | 1976 |
| | Wolverine Hunting | 60 | 1976 |
| | Mother's Love | 60 | 1976 |
| | Seagull Eating Fish | 55 | 1976 |
| | Shaman Calling | 50 | 1976 |
| | Squirrels Mating | 40 | 1976 |
| **Goyce Kakegamic** | Moose | 46 | 1975 |
| | Mother Goose | 56 | 1976 |
| | Birds at the Campfire | 58 | 1976 |
| | Drumming | 74 | 1977 |
| | Loon's Nocturnal Fight | 68 | 1977 |
| | Rain Dance | 70 | 1977 |
| **Barry Peters** | The Big Tease — Whiskey Jack and the Bear | 36 | 1976 |
| | Windigo and His Dog | 68 | 1976 |
| | Ojibway Jonah | 31 | 1976 |
| | Animal Spirit | 40 | 1977 |
| | Whiskey Jack and the Deerhead | 56 | 1977 |
| | Loon's Dive | 55 | 1977 |
| **Paddy Peters** | Lake Dwellers | 55 | 1977 |
| | Birds of a Feather | 50 | 1977 |
| | Otter and Fish | 54 | 1977 |
| | Wolverine | 63 | 1977 |

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